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BROWNING'S USE OF THE CLASSICS

Like the other English poets, Browning was educated and trained in an atmosphere permeated by the Greek and the Latin classics; but his special impetus to their study came, not from the Schools, but from the zeal of his father for the life and the literature of Greece and Rome. When he was a schoolboy, the elder Browning knew by heart the first book of the *Iliad* and all the *Odes* of Horace. And what he read was real to him, for he used to organize Homeric combats among his schoolmates, in which they fought in true Greek or Trojan style and incited themselves to battle by the use of speeches from the *Iliad*. The younger Browning was lulled to sleep in babyhood by an ode of Anacreon, and was early introduced to the story of Troy. In *Development* he tells how his father

piled up chairs and tables for a town,
Set me a-top for Priam, called our cat
Helen, enticed away from home (he said)
By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close
Under the footstool, being cowardly,
But whom—since she was worth the pains, poor puss—
Towzer and Tray,—our dogs, the Atreidai,—sought
By taking Troy to get possession of
—Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,
(My pony in the stable)—forth would prance
And put to flight Hector—our page boy's self.
This taught me who was who and what was what:
So far I rightly understood the case
At five years old; a huge delight it proved
And still proves—thanks to that instructor sage
My Father, who knew better than turn straight
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,
Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind,
Content with darkness and vacuity.

Two or three years later, he says, his father gave him Pope's translation; then, not long after, the original Greek; and Wolf's *Prolegomena*, when his intellect was keen enough to judge and his faith firm enough to "hold . . . in his heart of hearts and soul of souls" the "fiction" he had "treasured in his heart and soul so long". Thus it may well be of himself that he is speaking in *Pauline*:

They came to me in my first dawn of life
Which passed alone with wisest ancient books
All halo-girt with fancies of my own;
And I myself went with the tale. . . .

But aside from some fugitive allusions and quotations in *Pauline*, which are more in the vein of Shelley than of Browning's later classical work, there is no fruit of his classical studies until 1843. In that year he published, in the *Dramatic Lyrics*, a fragment, entitled *Artemis Prologizes*. Of this Browning said that it was

nearly all retained of a tragedy I composed much against my endeavor, while in bed with a fever two years ago—it went farther into the story of Hippolytus and Aricia; but when I got well, putting down only this much at once, I soon forgot the remainder.

That his wife was influential in reviving Browning's interest in Greek is obvious from their letters; yet it is plain that he had never lost the knowledge of that language which he had gained under the tutelage of his father. About two years after the publication of *Artemis Prologizes*, he began his correspondence and acquaintance with Miss Barrett, who was an ardent Greek student, and their letters are full of discussions of Aeschylus, of Miss Barrett's translation of the *Prometheus*, and of a proposal of Browning's that she write a new version of the story. Keen interpretation of thought and minute textual criticism in connection with the *Prometheus*, frequent classical allusions and quotations from authors Greek and Latin, well known and obscure, show, on the part of both poets, a remarkable familiarity with the writers of antiquity. As the friendship ripens, the discussion broadens to include far more than Aeschylus, and they run nearly the whole gamut of Greek literature. After they met, there are references to conversations face to face on the same topics. "And now", writes Browning after one call, "here is a week to wait before I shall have any occasion to relapse into Greek literature".

From this time on we catch many glimpses in his letters of his reading of the Classics. After the death of his wife they brought him solace and comfort, partly, perhaps, because of their association with her whose interest in them had been so inspiring. In 1862 he wrote to Miss Blagden from Biarritz, "For me, I have got on by having a great read at Euripides—the one book I brought with me". In 1870, he spent the summer at St. Aubin, Normandy, where he walked every morning, taking with him a small Greek copy of Homer, which was his constant companion. His interest in Euripides resulted eventually in the publication of *Balaustion's Adventure*, in 1871. In the following year, when he was at Fontainebleau, he was reading Aeschylus. In 1875, he wrote Aristophanes' *Apology*, which embodies the results of his studies in the Greek drama; and in 1877, at the "command" of Carlyle, he translated the *Agamemnon*. The shorter classical poems, *Pheidipides*, *Echetlos*, *Pan and Luna*, *Ixion*, *Apollo and the Fates*, and "Imperante Augusto Natus Est—", followed at intervals until his death. Thus practically all his work in the Classics was done late in life, after his marriage.

It is interesting to trace in his wife's opinions a similarity to Browning's theories in regard to the use of classical art as a model. Somewhat out of character for the moment, he had been urging her to write a new tragedy on the subject of Prometheus. She replied:

Ah! you tempt me with a grand vision of Prometheus! I, who just escaped with my life, after treading Milton's ground, you would send me to Aeschylus's. No, *I do not dare*. And besides . . . I am inclined to think that we want new forms, as well as thoughts. The old gods are dethroned. Why should we go back to the antique moulds, classical moulds, as they are so improperly called? If it is a necessity of Art to do so, why then those critics are right who hold that Art is exhausted and the world too worn out for poetry. I do not for my part believe this: and I believe the so-called necessity of Art to be the mere feebleness of the artist. Let us all aspire rather to *Life*, and let the dead bury their dead.

Here, in his wife's words, is Browning's own protest against the copying of the work of earlier artists. He had already expressed it in the words of Jules, the sculptor, writing to Monsignor that "since his hand could manage a chisel, he has practised expressing other men's Ideals; and in the very perfection he has attained to, he foresees an ultimate failure". In *Old Pictures in Florence* he voices the feeling that Greek art, having already "reached the goal", offers in its very perfection a stultifying influence, an obstacle to effort or ambition. The belief that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp" was perhaps the kernel of Browning's philosophy, and no mere imitation of antique models could satisfy his craving for ideals. So, at the close of the *Parleying* with Gerard de Lairese, to the word of the poets,

Dream afresh old godlike shapes,
Recapture ancient fable,

he replies,

Let things be—not seem,
I counsel rather,—do and nowise dream!
Earth's young significance is all to learn:
The dead Greek lore lies buried in its urn
Where who seeks fire finds ashes.

And is it not with sarcasm that he speaks of Matthew Arnold in the Preface to his version of the *Agamemnon*, when he says that his translation "may help to illustrate his <Arnold's> assurance that 'the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style' "? In fact, one of his biographers is convinced that the translation was made partly "for the pleasure of exposing these claims and of rebuking them".

It was not, then, as a model of style that classical literature appealed to him, nor yet as a beautiful envelope in which to wrap social or political propaganda. To Greek and Roman life and literature, Browning reacted in an eminently characteristic way. To him, a poet always interested in the portrayal of human life, it was the men and women of olden days that appealed.

As was the case with so many of the writers of the nineteenth century, it was the older literature of Greece

that drew him, rather than that of Rome. The greater spontaneity of the Greek masterpieces and the greater charm which many people find in the Greek language, as well as the ideals of beauty expressed by the Greek writers, are sufficient to account for this in the Romantic period, and do so partially in the case of Browning. He considered Greek "the most perfect language in the world", and loved it proportionately, in spite of his rebellion against the perfection of Greek art. The real reason, however, for Browning's greater love for Greek lies in the fact that the Greeks, like himself, were interested chiefly in the portrayal of human life. The broad national spirit of Vergil, for instance, appealed to him less than the human interest of Homer. When Vergil attracts Browning, it is his "tenderness" rather than his patriotism that finds a response.

The same thing holds true in regard to his attitude toward the Greek that he loves so well. He ignores the interpretation of the *Alcestis* which represents Admetus as symbolical of the State, and fixes his attention solely on the individual characters. It is not the beauty of structure or of expression in Greek tragedy that calls forth his praise, but the persons of the drama, the "fair pale sister" who "went to the chill grave, with power to love and to be loved and live", or "that king treading the purple calmly to his death". In the same poem he speaks of "the lore, loved for itself and all it shows". At the close of *Balaustion's Adventure*, he writes:

I know the poetess that graved in gold
This style and title for Euripides,
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

The Classics furnished Browning with subject-matter for twelve of his poems. The first was *Artemis Prologizes* (1843), which was intended to be merely the prologue to a drama in the Greek form on the subject of Hippolytus and Aricia. This is a characteristic Euripidean prologue and may well be compared with that to Euripides's *Hippolytus*, although the speakers and the stories told are different. There is, however, the same restraint and brevity in expression, the same simplicity, which shows that at this time Euripides had more influence upon his style than he had in later years. It is the most purely classical of all his poems.

Twelve years later he published *Cleon*, which is supposed to be a letter written by a Greek poet, artist, and musician of the first century after Christ to the tyrant Protus. Cleon is linked to the glorious past of Greece by a truly Hellenic culture which permeates his letter, and by his love for the perfection of human beauty, and to the future by his gropings after a belief in immortality. Does not this poem represent one of the nobler sides of paganism which Dowden (Robert Browning, 379) says Browning seems not to have understood?

A lapse of sixteen years brings us to 1871, the year of the publication of *Balaustion's Adventure*, the year of the introduction to the world of the "crown of Browning's women", the wild pomegranate flower of Rhodes. The setting of the story of her adventure, when, by the recitation of the *Alcestis*, she saved from the hostility

¹See Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 2. 446-447.

of the Syracusans and the hands of the pirates the ship on which she and her companions were voyaging to Athens, is derived from the following passage at the close of Plutarch's *Life of Nikias*:

'Several were saved for the sake of Euripides. . . . It is told that a ship of Caunus fleeing into one of their harbors for protection, pursued by pirates, was not received, but forced back, till one asked if they knew any of Euripides's verses, and, on their saying they did, they were admitted, and their ship brought into the harbor.'

The tale is told by Balaustion to four of her girl companions after her safe arrival in Athens, and shortly before her marriage with Euthukles, the Phocian, who, having fallen in love with her at Syracuse, followed her to Greece. She repeats to them too the play by which she had saved her life, mingling with the recitation bits of criticism and description.

The primary cause of Browning's admiration for Euripides was the Greek poet's interest in human beings. Also the sympathy between them, as has been said, was perfectly natural, because both men were innovators². And Browning was particularly happy in choosing to express that admiration through the mouth of a Greek girl. Embodied as it is in the commentary on a remarkably faithful and poetic translation of the *Alcestis*, it serves the double purpose of keen criticism and vivid portrayal of character. That which is of importance gains in value and weight by its artistic setting. The question whether Browning was right in his interpretation of the meaning of Euripides in this play is one of the most interesting and also one of the most widely disputed points in connection with Browning's classicism. Professor R. G. Moulton³ took up the cudgels against him, holding that Euripides meant Admetus to be the representative of the State, to the good of which the individual must be sacrificed, and that, therefore, there was no intention in the Greek of making the king selfish, and that all Browning's analysis of the change in his character is a "beautiful misrepresentation of the original". With this view Stopford Brooke seems to agree in the main, holding that the idea of self-sacrifice with its half-Christian touches⁴, is more subtle than Greek simplicity would have conceived, and that the notion that Admetus hates himself in his father is too modern for a Greek⁵. On the other hand, there are many who say, and undoubtedly many more who think, that Browning is right⁶. However Euripides

may have intended Admetus to appear to his contemporaries, and however Admetus may have appeared to them, the fact remains that to the large majority of modern readers, with nineteenth or twentieth century ideals of self-sacrifice and chivalry, Admetus will appear a paragon of selfishness. Though we may assure ourselves that Alcestis was merely fulfilling the highest duty of a Greek wife, whose importance was subordinate to that of her husband, we cannot help being thankful for her sake that some change did take place in Admetus before she returned to live with him again. As for Browning's new version of the story, suggested at the end of the poem, that seems quite un-Greek. It is too subjective and imaginative for Euripides.

Balaustion, thoroughly Greek in her culture, her keen intelligence, her grace and freedom of spirit, does not pass from sight after her marriage. She returns in a "last adventure", in the poem *Aristophanes' Apology*, published in 1875. Here she is represented as flying with her husband back to Rhodes after the fall of Athens, and recalling as they sail some of the events which preceded the catastrophe of her adopted city. Chief among them is the visit from Aristophanes on the night that the news of Euripides's death was brought to Athens. Their all night argument, when Aristophanes made his *apologia* and his hostess defended Euripides, closed with the reading by Balaustion of the *Heracles*, "the perfect piece". There is much keen and just criticism of the Greek drama. The many details in the representation of the characteristics and purposes of Aristophanes and Euripides, and in the historical sketch of the development of Greek drama inspire the reader with a respect for the thoroughness of Browning's study, and make a fund of information, either in the memory or in convenient books of reference, a prerequisite to a full appreciation and enjoyment of the poem and a real judgment on its merits as a piece of criticism. It is clear, however, that his admiration for Euripides is as strong as ever, that his judgment of his idealism and his revolt against tradition is a true one, and that he justifies the lofty purpose, the truth, and the art of his favorite tragic poet. But his preference does not lead him to be unfair to others; he does full justice to Aristophanes. As Mrs. Orr wrote (*Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 2.446-447).

To Aristophanes he gave the dramatic sympathy which one lover of life can extend to another, though that other unduly extol its lower forms. To Euripides he brought the palm of the higher truth, to his work the tribute of the more pathetic human emotion.

It is obvious, also, that the history of the rise of Greek comedy, and the representation of the work and the purposes of both dramatists are accurate in the main, the bias due to Browning's own preference being in emphasis rather than in any misrepresentation of the facts. In the words of Mahaffy (quoted by Professor Moxon, in the paper referred to above, 414)

Mr. Browning has treated the controversy between Euripides and Aristophanes with more learning and

²William Cranston Lawton, *The Classical Element in Browning's Poetry*, in the Boston Browning Society Papers, 1897, 371.

³In a paper entitled *Balaustion's Adventure as a Beautiful Misrepresentation of the Original*, read before the London Browning Society, June 26, 1891. The paper was published in the *Transactions of the Society*, Part XIII, No. 61, with "perversion" substituted for "misrepresentation" in the title.

⁴I presume he means sacrifice for another person, not for an ideal. His discussion is to be found in his book, *The Poetry of Robert Browning*, 374.

⁵But compare the Greek play, 958-959.

⁶Professor P. S. Moxon, in a paper on *Balaustion's Idea of Euripides* (Boston Browning Society Papers, 1897, 430-436), points out that there is no indication either in Alcestis's own words or in those of the Chorus that she is dying for the State. He compares with her dying speech those of Menoikeus, in the *Phoenissae*, and of Iphigenia, in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, noting that both express their sense of sacrifice for the State, whereas Alcestis speaks only as if she were dying for her husband.

ability than all other critics in his "Aristophanes' Apology", which is, by the way, an Euripides' Apology also, if such be required at the present day.

Above all, this poem is a remarkable portrayal of Athenian life. The vivid scenes, with their contrasts in characters and moods—the change that came over the theater crowds with the news of Euripides's death; the intrusion of Aristophanes, "tolerably drunk", with his merry crew of actors and chorus, into the house where Balaustion and Euthukles were talking of their friend; the arrival of Sophocles at the Archon's feast—all these linger long in the memory. Balaustion, Aristophanes, Euthukles, Phaps-Elaphion lead a real existence, and create for us a varied picture of Athens just before her fall. In this respect Aristophanes' Apology reminds the reader of Landor's Pericles and Aspasia.

Two years later, at the command, as he said, of Carlyle, Browning undertook the translation of the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. He had already translated two of Euripides's plays, the Alcestis and the Heracles, incorporating them in the two poems about Balaustion. However much scholars have found fault with the interpretation of the former play, little has been said in the way of unfriendly criticism of the translation itself. It is faithful to the original, and poetic in a high degree, and the same is true of the rendering of the Heracles. Of the latter, A. H. Way said that, unfortunately for succeeding translators, the Madness of Heracles had already been given by Browning to English readers⁷. But, in regard to the Agamemnon, opinion is divided. To some it seems more obscure than the original, one critic even saying that he needs the Greek before him in order to be able to understand the English. All agree that it is literal to the last degree. Certainly Browning chose for his dialogue a meter that is harsh—harsh, that is, in his manner of using it. The sonority of the Greek is ill represented by the cacophony of the closing feet of the following lines:

Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand
O' the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!
As for the rest, I'm mute: on tongue a big ox
Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take should,
Most plain would speak.

And the sounding compounds of Aeschylus degenerate sadly into such an English combination as "bad-wave-outbreak evils". Such 'Gothic' grotesqueness, however, is characteristic of Browning's style, and according to his own theory he has given us a good translation. In the Preface to the transcription, with the evident intention of forestalling criticism, he wrote,

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so with the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. . . . I would be tolerant for once . . . of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear. . . . I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed

magniloquence and sonority of the Greek. . . . I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to represent Aeschylus. . . . All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were⁸.

With his other translations should be mentioned that of a lyric in the Hippolytus of Euripides, Oh Love! Love (1879), as perfect as anything of the kind could be. Of it Mahaffy wrote (Euripides, 115), "Mr. Browning has honored me with the following translation of these stanzas, so that the general reader may not miss the meaning or the spirit of the ode".

Two of the Dramatic Idylls of 1879 and 1880 had for their subjects Greek stories. Pheidippides's adventure with the great god Pan is related by Herodotus, Pausanias, and Nepos, but the part played by the hero in and after the battle of Marathon seems to be Browning's own invention. Instinct with life and action, and filled with a spirit of love of country, the poem Pheidippides has always had an especial appeal for young people, and has often formed part of their earliest introduction to Greek history and legend. Greek patriotism is also the theme of the story of Echelos, the mysterious hero of the plowshare, whose picture, as Pausanias tells us, was on the wall of the Stoa Poikile in Athens.

One of the two poems in which Browning makes direct use of Latin material as subject-matter is Pan and Luna (1880), a re-rendering of the myth alluded to by Vergil, Georgics 3.391-393. Browning's expansion of a few suggestive verses may be compared with the practice of Tennyson as exemplified especially in The Lotus Eaters. Browning, however, is much more unfettered in his rendering, and adapts an idea or a story to his own ends with far more freedom.

An interesting example of such an adaptation is the poem Ixion, published in 1883. Classical in subject, it is far from classical in treatment. Browning's intention, it has been claimed, was to make Ixion's philosophy representative of the religious development of the human race from a belief in the "god of human error" to a faith in the truly Divine—"past Zeus to the Potency o'er him". Such an interpretation removes the inconsistency between the two parts of the poem. It would be impossible for a Greek or a Roman to conceive of one who, in his opinion, is being justly tortured for his arrogance and presumption, and who acknowledges that Zeus is the author of his punishment, as arriving at the conclusion that Zeus is a mere phantom. But the difficulty vanishes if we consider that the poem was written by a nineteenth century philosopher looking back over the ages of human thought.

⁷In this same Preface he alludes to his practice of transliterating Greek proper names. He gave the reasons for his custom in a reply to an article by Frederick Harrison, in the Nineteenth Century for January, 1886. He said that he did it because of the general familiarity of the educated Englishman with Greek forms, because "the letters substituted for those in ordinary English use . . . do no more than represent to the unscholarly what the scholar accepts without scruple", and because "the substitute letters effect no sort of organic change, so as to jostle the word from its pride of place in English verse or prose". But for a criticism of the second reason, see William Cranston Lawton, The Classical Element in Browning's Poetry, in the Boston Browning Society Papers, 1897, 374-375.

⁸In The Tragedies of Euripides in English Verse, 2, p. v.

Two more titles complete the list of the classical poems. The Prologue to the Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day is concerned with the visit of Apollo to the Fates to secure from them the reprieve for Admetus. This shows that the appeal of Alcestis was still strong sixteen years after Balaustion's Adventure was written. Worth noting in connection with Balaustion's idea of the character of Admetus are the words of Apollo as he departs, "But he spurns the exchange, rather dies", and the mocking laughter which is his only reply from Atropos.

In Browning's last volume, *Asolando*, was published the other poem which reflects Latin thought, "Imperante Augusto Natus Est—". Written in Browning's favorite form, the dramatic monologue, it reflects the pagan dread of Nemesis and vividly presents a bit of the daily life of Rome under Augustus. The "offshoot of Etruscan kings" is there, and

Virgil and Horace, singers—in their way—
Nearly as good as Varius, though less famed.

Upon the other poems, not classical in subject matter, Browning's classical training and study had comparatively little effect, aside from the usual number of quotations and allusions to be found in the work of almost any Victorian poet. Greek and Latin quotations occur commonly in the poems and in the letters, although in the latter it is more frequently Miss Barrett who employs the classic phrase. Much as he prefers the Greek, it is the Latin poets, Vergil and Horace, who lead in the number of quotations, with Ovid third. This may be partially explained by the fact that by far the largest number of quotations occurs in *The Ring and the Book*, especially in the speech of Doctor Bottinius, lawyer for the Fisc. The advocate for Guido also naturally indulges in "Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank". Allusions, too, are numerous, but these are chiefly to Greek stories and passages. The phraseology bears little mark of the Classics. A few compounds in the earlier poems, under the influence of the Homeric compounds, and a few phrases, such as "marmoreal domes" in *Fifine at the Fair*, are the chief traces.

In the form of his work, as was natural for a man of his opinions, Browning was little affected by classic models. 'Classic brevity' and 'classic repose' were almost unknown to him. Aristophanes' *Apology*, for instance, is four times as long as any extant Greek tragedy, and Professor Jowett said of Browning, "There is no rest in him". He has adapted several of the Latin meters to his uses, notably the elegiac, in *Ixion*, and the hexameter, in *Pheidippides*. There is little, however, that is truly classical in either of these poems. The elegiac is ill suited to Browning's abrupt and disjointed style, and the swift movement of *Pheidippides*, with the last syllable of the hexameter lacking, is far from the sonorousness and dignity of either Homer or Vergil. That he used Vergil as a model in *How They Brought the Good News* is shown by an anecdote

told by Joaquin Miller. He was present on one occasion when a quotation was made from the poem before Browning, and he,

beating the time and clang of galloping horses' feet on the table with his fingers, repeated the exact measure from Virgil. . . . I then told Browning I . . . would like to borrow the measure and spirit of his "Good News" for a prairie fire on the plains, driving buffalo and all other life before it into the river. "Why not borrow from Virgil as I did? He is as rich as one of your gold mines, while I am but a poor scribe!"¹⁹

And in *Before*, Browning comes quite close, whether intentionally or not, to the old Saturnian.

Among his dramas, *The Return of the Druses* observes carefully the classic unities, and was said by E. C. Stedman (*Victorian Poets*, 313) to be, in its earnest pitch and lack of sprightly underplot, Greek or Italian. The poem entitled *Luria*, too, preserves the unities of time and place.

Browning was almost wholly independent of classic thought. Euripides probably had more influence upon him than any other single writer. The long passage in the Pope's soliloquy in *The Ring and the Book*, which deals with Euripides's ideas of the Deity, shows his growing interest in that poet and philosopher. Although there seems to be elsewhere no connection between Browning and Lucretius, and although in general Browning, a man who "always marched breast-forward", is as far as possible from the Epicurean theory of "passionless tranquillity", and the author of *Prospice* from disbelief in the immortality of the soul, there is a resemblance at least in *Caliban* to the ideas of the deity set forth by the Roman philosopher. Setebos, the capricious, is that god that Lucretius would prove impossible, the god of the common intellect. And the Quiet, the "something over Setebos", that *Caliban* is dimly groping to conceive of, that

Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,
But never spends much thought nor care that way,

reminds one forcibly of Lucretius's 'careless gods'.

It is, then, mainly as a portrayer of Greek men and women that we are to think of Browning in relation to the Classics. In a century when every poet was trying his hand at Greek themes, there were as many types of treatment as there were poets. Of them all, Browning was nearest to Landor in his methods and results. Aristophanes' *Apology* is an Imaginary Conversation in rhythm, and vies with Pericles and Aspasia in its vivid picture of Greek life. To speak paradoxically, it was because Landor was the most Greek of the nineteenth century writers that Browning was both like and unlike him. They were alike in the way in which they both disregarded all phases of the Classics but one, or at least subordinated the others to that one—human life. The points of unlikeness are the same as those which separate Browning from the Greeks—his aversion to perfection as a bar to progress, his lack of brevity and conciseness, and especially his tendency to subjective inter-

¹⁹Quoted by Dowden, *Robert Browning*, 251.

¹⁹The Complete Poetical Works of Joaquin Miller, 39 (San Francisco, 1897).

pretation of incident and character. Interested as he was in the development of men's souls, the objective treatment of the Greek dramatists did not satisfy him. He was not content, with Euripides, merely to show the change in Admetus's character; he must analyze every step in the change. It was not as representatives of the "glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" that he saw these people, but as human souls. The men and women of classic lands, however, formed only one of the many groups to which he turned to study character. As Mr. Horace E. Scudder, the editor of the Cambridge Edition of his works says¹¹,

He is a poet of varied experience, who, coming in contact with a great and distinct manifestation of human life, is moved to strike in here also with his thought and fancy, and because of the very elemental nature of the material, to find the keenest delight in exercising his genius upon it.

Combining as he did this interest in his characters with a wide knowledge of their environments, he produced poems which carry with them a strong emotional and intellectual appeal, and inspire a firm conviction of their fidelity to antiquity in fact and in spirit.

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REVIEW

Die Ilias und Homer. Von Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. Berlin: Weidmann (1916). Pp. 523.

A generation separates this work from the author's study of the Odyssey (Homerische Untersuchungen, 1884), which, we are told, was a preparation for the analysis of the Iliad. In the intervening years Wilamowitz has become more familiar with the scholia, especially because of his collaboration with Maass on the Townley Scholia, and the scholia play a much larger part in the present book. We note with pleasure the praise given to Eustathius, although little or no use is made of his Commentaries. In general, Zenodotus is preferred to Aristarchus as having given a text freer from later accretions. Besides, the great Alexandrian was a Unitarian, and all such are anathema to Wilamowitz. He calls them fanatical "Einheitshirte", parrot-echoers of the slavish Aristarchus and Aristarcholaters. His contempt for them is so great that he does not even refer to their works. In analysing the Diomedea he notes with approval the work of H. Jordan, Lillge, and Finsler, but fails to mention Drerup's Das Fünfte Buch der Ilias (1913). Nowhere in the book do we find reference to Rothe, Scott, or Shewan. Mr. Shewan, at least, might have been mentioned in view of his criticism of the author's essay on Book 8, which forms the second chapter of the present work.

Wilamowitz is, of course, the Hellenist *par excellence* of the German race of to-day. We must, however, remember two things about him. He is not a specialist in Homer. He has not spent all his energies on the poet, as, for example, Rothe did. One who has not, as

it were, lived with the poems is not so likely to appreciate the atmosphere in which they were composed and recited. Again, Wilamowitz confesses a slight lack of sympathy with Homer. To him the greatest contribution of Hellas was in the realm of philosophy and science, and the last sentence of his analysis (376) indicates that the author is passing with pleasure to his work on Plato. It is as a scientist—in the science of the historical method, the gift to the world of the great German movement (16)—that Wilamowitz approaches Homer, and science ill comports with poetry.

Yet Wilamowitz does not base his criticism on science alone; he sets the highest value on the feeling for style, and regrets that he did not pay greater attention to this in his work on the Odyssey. All will heartily agree, and even fanatical Shepherds of the Unity will find both pleasure and profit in his sympathetic treatment of many episodes in the poem (compare Miss Stawell, Homer and the Iliad, 138), for example, the Iris episode in Book 23. The footnotes, too, are packed full of valuable textual, historical, and geographical matter, and the 100 pages of "Beilagen" are a contribution in themselves.

The analytical nature of the book makes it suitable less for reading than for study chapter by chapter in connection with the different portions of the Iliad. A detailed criticism is of course impossible here.

Thirty years ago Wilamowitz concluded that Homer was a real person and a poet; he left open the question whether he was a great poet who composed, for example, the Patrocleia and the Ransom (24), or a mere botcher who gave us the present Iliad (Homerische Untersuchungen, 380). To-day he answers the latter question and is more precise as to the former conclusion. Homer (originally, perhaps, Homaros, the Aeolic form) was born in Smyrna at least as early as 750 B.C., and lived in Chios. He is a different poet from the Melesigenes of the Vitae. He is the "Ordner" of an 'Iliad', that is, on the basis of many shorter and longer poems—all recited and not sung, although based on earlier lays, and many of them of great merit—he composed a poem which later was worked over into its present form. Homer's 'Iliad', speaking roughly consisted of 1-7. 321, 11-15. 591, and 16-23. 256. The poems which Homer found at hand and incorporated into his 'Iliad' were in brief 2 (without the Catalogue); 3-7. 321, a little epic by itself which, before Homer used it, had already taken in the Diomedea and the Glaucus episode, for example; 11 (without the Nestor episode); the poems which underlie 12-15, the original versions of 18 (in which Patroclus had not worn the armor of Achilles, although the description of the Shield is an early poem) 19, 20, and 21; and 22-23. 256. As a unifying thread Homer invented the Διὸς βουλῆ (so also Mueller, to whom Wilamowitz does not refer), and the Διὸς ἀράν as a counter-motif. His work is best seen in Book 1, which is all Homer's, except the Chryseis episode (428-488), and in the 'Achilleis' of 18 in its original form, and 21-23. 256. Homer lived when the epic had reached its high-

¹¹See the Biographical Sketch of Browning, in the Cambridge Edition of the Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, xvii.

est degree of perfection. He was the great epic poet of Hellas. His *Iliad* had a different ending from ours; Hector's body was given to the dogs, and the poem ended with the death of Achilles. The addition of the Games and the Ransom at a later date caused the original ending to be discarded. After Homer's '*Iliad*' was complete the following poems were added: the Catalogue, 8, 9, 10, the Nestor episode of 11, the exchange of armor in 16, the Shield episode of 18, the Games and the Ransom of 23 and 24. There were further workings over of the poem, and many disturbing insertions of episodes, additions, different versions, doublets, junctures and conclusions of episodes added by rhapsodists, and finally interpolations in the text. It will be noticed that Wilamowitz conforms to the general trend of higher criticism in assigning a more prominent part in our *Iliad* to Homer, and therefore giving him a later date (compare the work of Wecklein, Muelder, Finsler, and others) than was the custom a generation or two ago. Homer has gained by this conclusion.

The main body of the book before us, pages 26-259, is devoted to the analysis. The author, as it were, takes down the epic edifice which we call the *Iliad*, and shows us what he believes to be the quality and the comparative age of the different parts. The structure is first rent asunder by the removal of Books 8, 9, and 10. The Games and the Ransom are next taken away, and the hypothesis of the 'original' ending is set forth. Then the author works backwards through the last third of the poem, 20, 21; 22-23, 256, 16-17, and 18-19; then through the central third, 11, and 12-15. Lastly the first third, 1, 2, 3-7, 321, is disintegrated. The main part of the work concludes with chapters on the '*Iliad*' of Homer, on its relation to the saga, the shorter epics and the separate poems, and on Homer himself. A condensed view of the results is given in the Index.

Wilamowitz stands midway between the 'orgies of purely intellectual criticism' and the 'arbitrariness of the Unitarians, who pose as critics' (20). He objects to the 'Crumblers' of the poem (23), who multiply parallel versions and workings over of the poem. The epic dialect is an artificial language: to disintegrate the poems on the basis of forms, differences of expression, use of singular and plural, and of shorter and longer phrasings is too mechanical. This kind of study has its uses, no doubt, but for the whole poem only the thought, the contents, and the poetic tone must decide. He cannot tolerate the treatment of Homer as history, geography, or chronology, says little about 'Odyssean' elements of the *Iliad*, and rejects the arguments from the analogy of folk epics: Homer is far from being 'Volksdichtung'. Nor are the heroes faded gods. All this marks distinct progress towards the Unitarian position. Wilamowitz even admits that a great poet may be careless at times in both narrative and style, and that the later as well as the earlier poems which have been incorporated into Homer may possess great poetic merit. But he differs *loco caelo* from the Unitarians in believing (25) that the most important aim of study of the

Iliad is to differentiate the various poetic individualities that contributed to its formation. On page 25 he says: 'Only long familiarity will give one the capacity for distinguishing the marks of individual style. A beginner cannot do it, and he who has not noticed such differences will deny them'.

This seems to us in a sense to beg the question. For who was more familiar with the poem than was Rothe, not to mention Scott and Shewan and many others who fail to see the differences which Wilamowitz sees? A sound criticism ought first, we think, to lay down some criterion of style, such, for example, as Rothe gave us in his works on the Repetitions, on the Contradictions, and on *Die Ilias als Dichtung*. And such a criterion must include the assumption that the same poet may show widely different styles and points of view in youth, maturity, and age (see especially Laurand, *Apropos d'Homère. Progrès et Recul de la Critique* [Paris, 1913]). Is it sound criticism to say, for example, that the same poet cannot portray Achilles in different moods? that the poet of the *Achilleis* focuses the attention on one man <therefore when our attention is divided among several heroes we are reading the work of a different poet>? that the same poet cannot at one time describe masses of troops and at another think only of single champions? that the use of many similes indicates an earlier poem? that the Chryseis episode in Book 1 cannot be the work of 'Homer' because it describes a typical scene, and that the poet of Book 2, if he had written Book 1, would have narrated the sufferings of the Achaeans under the plague, and would have described the cripple Hephaestus?

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Wilamowitz's 'feeling for style', without a broader and more perfectly defined criterion, reduces the Homeric question to '*ὁμηρικὸν μέτρον ἀνθρώπου*'. For the only criterion which he uses is interpretation, and, when we turn from his book to Homer himself, and carefully examine the passages in the light of Wilamowitz's arguments, again and again we find that his interpretations deserve the epithet which he himself so frequently applies to the views of his opponents—'arbitrary'. Let us take one example. On page 87, 20.495-504 is cited as noteworthy because it is 'perhaps the most striking example of a rhapsodist's addition'. The passage contains the beautiful picture of the bulls treading out the white barley, to which is compared the passing of Achilles in his chariot over the dead bodies of the Trojans. Of this Wilamowitz writes thus: 'This simile, together with a few verses from XI, 534 ff., can have been added only to give a beautiful close to the recitation of the rhapsodist. The verses are impossible here. They show us Achilles mounted in his chariot, whereas from the beginning of XX to the end of XXII he fights on foot; only when he wishes to drag Hector's body is his chariot (naturally) at hand. Achilles is the 'swift-footed' <i. e. not the 'knight'>, and acts the part here (XX-XXI)'.

What do we find when we turn to Homer? (1) Achilles is called 'swift-footed' in 19.419, and there he addresses his steeds and then mounts his chariot, and Wilamowitz believes the passage to be genuine. (2) There is no

evidence that the six verses in question, or any parts of them, are borrowed from 11.534 ff. Leaf, whose edition Wilamowitz commends elsewhere in his book, finds that, if any borrowing must be assumed, our passage is the original, and the simile is in the best epic style. Wilamowitz, too, has no fault to find with the simile. (3) The verses which follow the passage (i. e. 21.1 ff.) are held by Wilamowitz to be genuine. They show that a considerable distance has been passed over by the advancing Achaeans since the beginning of the battle, and therefore make the use of the chariot natural. Furthermore, 21.1-2 are found also at 14.433 f. and the first one, at least, at 24.692; in both cases the chariot is used. (4) In the closing scene of Book 19 (original, according to Wilamowitz) Achilles 'held his horses among the foremost'. Hence—to employ Wilamowitz's own favorite weapon, the dilemma—if we follow Wilamowitz, and regard the first part of Book 20 (the preparation for the Theomachy) as very late, the Aeneas episode as an insertion, and the rest of Book 20 up to 454 as patchwork, it follows that the poet has referred to Achilles in his chariot well within (say) 100 verses of this 'most striking case of a rhapsodist's addition'. If, on the other hand, we follow Homer, we find that at the beginning of the battle Achilles is in his chariot (19.424), and at its close he uses the chariot to drag Hector's body to the ships. Therefore the passage, far from being employed to conclude a rhapsodist's recitation, not only serves as one means of unifying the account of the whole battle, and of marking by its fine simile one of the stages of the fight, but it also helps to connect the end of 20 with the end of 19, and with the beginning of 21.

But the 'original' conclusion of Homer's *Iliad*, the death of Achilles, which the author regards not as a probability, but as an established fact, is entirely new. Let us examine his arguments. (1) The confusion of the text in 23.181 ff. indicates clearly to Wilamowitz that at 23.24 Achilles must have carried out his threat and must have given Hector's body to the dogs. Rothe (*Die Ilias als Dichtung*, 320) has sufficiently answered this. (2) At 22.381, after slaying Hector, Achilles thinks of carrying on the fight, and gives up the idea only because he must first bury Patroclus, a duty which in the heat of the battle he has forgotten; at 23.53 he urges the completion of the funeral rites 'that the soldiers may turn to their work', i. e. (according to Wilamowitz) 'go on with the fighting'. 'Therefore we expect the storming of Ilios'. In using the first passage in this way Wilamowitz ignores one of the finest psychological touches in the whole poem; the second seems to have only a general reference to the return to the routine of camp life. But, if any particular tasks are meant, these would more naturally be the burial of the dead and the clearing of the camp. There is certainly no apparent indication in the phrase that an attack on Ilios is thought of. We may note in passing that one of the traits of style by which Wilamowitz distinguishes the poet of the *Achilleis* is a lack of interest in the masses of soldiers (115). (3) The repeated reference to the

death of Achilles in Book 18 and the following books shows that the poet intended to narrate this episode. For lack of space I merely refer to Miss Stawell's book, 188, where this point is well discussed. (4) Wilamowitz adds (79),

'Who can deny that the opening of the *Iliad* will be finer if the countless woes of the Achaeans reach a climax in the death of Achilles, and if his soul is among those that are sent down to Hades?'

If we should read here, 'finer to Wilamowitz', we could agree. But to us there is a fundamental objection to the giving of Hector's body to the dogs, which Wilamowitz posits in order to remove the present close of the poem and to make room for the new ending. Throughout the poem Hector has our sympathy, as well as the favor of Zeus. We think that a proper feeling for a great poet's 'wollen und können' would make it inconceivable that a princely burial be denied Hector. Furthermore, if one wishes to assume that in the original *Iliad* the death of the hero is described, there is no reason why this should not follow equally as well, if not better, Book 24. Certainly in that case Achilles would have our entire sympathy, as he would not if he had gratified his vengeance to the full. We see no reason to prevent assuming, if one chooses, that the poet may once have had in mind the possibility of composing a sequel to Book 24. We merely wish to call attention to the fact that the nature of the evidence which Wilamowitz uses, the way in which he uses it, and the sureness with which his hypothesis is treated as an established fact (324) weaken all confidence which may have existed in the so-called historical 'Wissenschaft'.

Some minds see the anomalies; to others the analogies are more apparent to the eye. Wilamowitz puts this clearly in the only passage in which he has a good word for the Unitarians (327):

'Here the Unitarians have a sounder and more poetic feeling than the *Liederjaeger*. . . . But they <the Unitarians> have seen the woods, and not the trees'.

We must confess, that, as in reading Plato we had rather follow Professor Shorey than Dr. Lutoslawski, so we prefer to approach the most splendid existing grove of the Muses in the spirit of the landscape painter, and not in that of the dendrologist. It is again the conflict between science and poetry. Doubtless there will always be scholars who, like Dr. Leaf (see his *Troy*, 2), in spite of the effort and the desire to believe the unity of the *Iliad*, feel compelled to maintain the diversity of its authorship¹. But the Unitarians are increasing in numbers: the whole movement for the past twenty years has been in their direction. Even Wilamowitz's analysis is a long step towards the Unitarian position, and a compromise seems not altogether unlikely at some time in the future.

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¹Since the above was written the reviewer has read Dr. Leaf's Presidential Address before the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies. Dr. Leaf has now so far adopted the Unitarian position that he regards the recent work of Wilamowitz as thirty years behind the times. May we soon see a third edition of the great British Homeric scholar's *Iliad*, revised in accordance with his new point of view!